

Edith Hartenstein Basseches

Refugee, Community Supporter, Census Taker

The U.S. Census Bureau has a proud history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. For this reason, the Census Bureau has always embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities. This workforce included many people who immigrated to the United States and eventually became citizens. Many of these new citizens became enumerators who were especially helpful in counting residents who did not speak English. Also among this group were those escaping the brutal repression of Nazi Germany. They, too, brought valuable skills that helped improve their new country through community and civil service.



The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)
October 2, 1967.

POPULATION SCHEDULE									
NAME	RELATION	AGE	SEX	RACE	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	EDUCATION	INDUSTRY	REMARKS
Edith Hartenstein	Head	19	F	White	April 23, 1921	Vienna, Austria	High School	Housewife	
Hugo Hartenstein	Wife	19	F	White	April 23, 1921	Vienna, Austria	High School	Housewife	
Irene Hartenstein	Daughter	12	F	White	April 23, 1921	Vienna, Austria	High School	Housewife	
Naomi Rosenfeld	Sister	12	F	White	April 23, 1921	Vienna, Austria	High School	Housewife	
Blanka Knie	Sister	12	F	White	April 23, 1921	Vienna, Austria	High School	Housewife	

Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

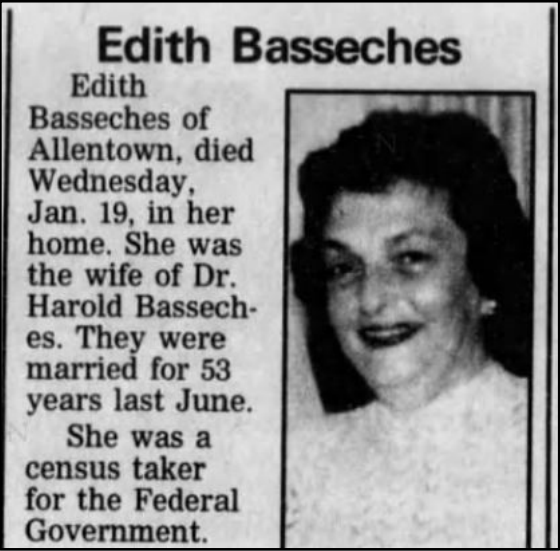
Edith’s family in their first U.S. Census in 1940.

She was born Edith Hartenstein on April 23, 1921, in Vienna, Austria. Edith’s father, Hugo, ran a print shop, while her mother, Irene, kept house and helped raise Edith. Edith studied at private schools, and the family lived in a diverse neighborhood. Hugo, a proud Austrian veteran of World War I, participated in civic organizations, including the Oddfellows International, which like many other social and civic groups, the Nazi Party eventually targeted and repressed.

Although the Nazis in Germany targeted large swaths of their population, including those from minority ethnic groups or religions and those with disabilities, Jewish people became the main “enemy” of the Nazi state. On November 10, 1938, this policy culminated in Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, which marked the starting point of violence towards Jewish people—as opposed to the social and legal exclusions used by the Nazi party after their rise to power in 1933. Edith remembered that on that day, at 9 a.m., two Nazi party supporters, known as Brownshirts, came to their apartment looking for men, weapons, and ammunition that might be used in opposition to the government.



The Morning Call (Allentown, PA) November 7, 1988.



The Morning Call (Allentown, PA) January 21, 2000.

Luckily, Hugo was not at home, although the Brownshirts did take one of the men staying with the Hartenstein family. Edith remembered from that moment on, every time someone came to the door, they worried about who it could be. Her father, who had avoided the round-up only by happening to take a break at a coffee shop, realized that despite his wartime service and the integration of the family into their neighborhood, Europe was no longer safe for Jewish people. On August 26, 1939, the family boarded a train from Vienna to Paris. Less than a week later, on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and launched the beginning of World War II. Unfortunately, not all of Edith’s family escaped in time—her grandmother perished at Auschwitz, while an uncle, also a print shop owner, barely survived the Buchenwald concentration camp.

The Hartenstein family continued from Paris to the United States, arriving in New York on September 16, 1939. In early 1940, the family started the naturalization process, with Edith gaining citizenship in 1944. During that same time, Edith attended the City College of New York, where she met Harold Basseches, who was studying to be a physicist. Harold earned his Bachelor of Science degree in 1943, and the couple married on June 11, 1946. The new couple moved to Pasadena, California, where Harold worked for the government, before heading to Columbus, Ohio—where Harold earned his doctorate from the Ohio State University in 1951. Edith and Harold then moved to Plainfield, New Jersey, before settling in Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1959.

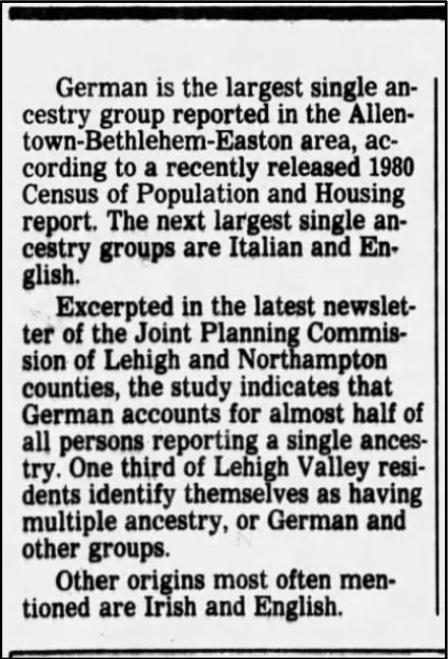
In addition to raising three children and maintaining the family home, Edith also worked hard to give back to her community through service. One of the groups with which she was most active was the League of Women Voters, where she served as chairperson and director. This organization helped encourage democracy through education in a nonpartisan manner. The group also organized an annual fundraiser for the United Nation’s Children Fund, which had been started in the wake of World War II to provide support to children in need. In addition to her volunteer work, which also included serving on her local Parent Teacher Association networks, Edith helped her community through her work as a census taker.

The area around Allentown contained some of the highest concentrations of German immigrants in the United States, so much so that they were known as the Pennsylvania Dutch (Dutch being a derivative of “Deutsch,” which is German for “German”). Edith’s comfort with the customs and language of her neighbors helped as she gathered information for the various surveys she worked on. Edith’s census work not only supported her other voting work by providing the apportionment count for the U.S. House of Representatives every 10 years, it also helped ensure her community received their proper share of government funds. In 2000, the year in which Edith passed away, the decennial census was used to distribute over \$100 billion in federal funds, and currently census surveys are responsible for the distribution of over \$675 billion in federal funding.

Throughout her life, Edith maintained her Jewish faith. Her children attended Hebrew school, she was an active member of her local synagogue, the Temple Beth El, and was a member of Hadassah, a Jewish women’s organization. Edith passed away at her home in Allentown on January 19, 2000, survived by her husband, 3 children, and 4 grandchildren. The Census Bureau is grateful for the perseverance and service of Edith, and all of the members of our diverse workforce.



The Morning Call (Allentown, PA) October 12, 1972.



The Morning Call (Allentown, PA) January 13, 1984.